FADRC

1834

December 13, 1978

Dear Ms. Heckler:

Thank you for your letter of December 4, in which you requested information about the U.S. response to the Guyana tragedy. As you know, the United States Government continues to be involved in this tragic episode and is investigating various aspects of the situation. Nevertheless, I wanted to give you an early response to the questions you have raised concerning this unprecedented matter.

On Sunday, November 19, it had become clear that the United States Government was facing a major crisis in Guyana. An American Congressman and other Americans in his party had been killed. A settlement believed to include over 1,000 Americans was involved, and its situation was uncertain. It was apparent that the Government of Guyana required assistance in handling a major emergency created by the presence of Americans within its borders.

The President, acting under his constitutional authority as Chief Executive and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, ordered the departments of our government to take action to deal with this emergency. The operational decisions within the U.S. Government in this unique situation were made by the Secretary of State in conjunction with some of his Cabinet colleagues.

Under the President's Executive authorities, medical evacuation for injured Americans was immediately ordered, and the United States Government offered assistance to the Government of Guyana to prevent further loss of life. As events progressed, it became clear that there were large numbers of Americans dead. For a time, it was believed that there were survivors in the jungle, and the United States adjusted and increased its assistance to help the search by Guyana police and military. Finally, when the full scope of the tragedy of Jonestown was clear, our Government was requested by the Government of Guyana to remove the bodies. This operation was considered essential in handling the emergency situation which existed in Guyana at the time.

The Honorable
Margaret M. Heckler,
House of Representatives.

/GDC/HR
DATE

The Justice Department is fully exploring possible legal remedies which can be used to recover the cost the U.S. Government has incurred in removing and processing the bodies of Americans from Guyana. Now that the emergency is substantially over, the Office of Management and Budget and other agencies are reviewing the various operations to determine the exact cost to the United States Government. Although the costs to the United States Government of an effort of this magnitude obviously are considerable, they are substantially less than the $8 million figure used in some press reports. Please be assured that we will report fully to appropriate congressional committees on these aspects of the operation upon completion of our review. Meanwhile, the Justice Department will make all efforts to recover the costs to the U.S. Government.

If you have any further questions, you may wish to contact Deputy Assistant Secretary John Bushnell. His telephone is 632-8562.

Sincerely,

OB/GW

Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

ARA/PPC:JSchreiber:mbb #0179-2263

Clearances: Inter-Agency
ARA:GLister
ARA:JBushnell
H:ENef
EH/GW

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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, U.S.
WASHINGTON, D. C.

December 4, 1978

ACTION
is assigned to
ARA

The attached communication is submitted for your consideration, and to ask that the request made therein be complied with, if possible.

If you will advise me of your action in this matter and have the letter returned to me with your reply, I will appreciate it.

RECEIVED
DEPARTMENT OF STATE
1978 DEC 7 AM 11 11
FADRC
DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

Very truly yours,

Margaret M. Heckler

M.C.

10th Massachusetts District.

re: US airlift of bodies from People's Temple in Guyana.

(2)

OFFICE OF CONGRESSWOMAN MARGARET M. HECKLER
10th CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT - MASSACHUSETTS

Date Received: 12/4/78
File Reference: State
Staff Member: Midge

Information obtained at:
Washington (X) Taunton ( )
Fall River ( ) Wellesley ( )
Mobile Office ( )

Case referred by: _____ Phone: _____
Address: _____ Relationship _____

Constituent of Case: _____ Phone: _____
Address: _____

MILITARY CASE:

Service Branch: _____ Rank: _____
Serial Number _____ SSN: _____
Military Address: _____

Social Security Number: _____ File Number _____
Veterans Claim Number: _____

DETAILS AND HISTORY

My office has received many inquiries regarding the U.S. airlift of bodies from the People's Temple suicide in Guyana. Your response providing justification for the use of taxpayers' money for this purpose will assist me in answering my constituents.

Please send written response to: Hon. Margaret M. Heckler
343 Cannon House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20515